

What exactly does the Alliance do?

The Alliance aims to end homelessness – and we do it in three ways:

- Improving homelessness policy

The Alliance works with federal policymakers to craft and refine homelessness policy.

- Building capacity

The Alliance's [Center for Capacity Building](#) works directly within communities, helping them implement policies and practices proven to reduce and end homelessness.

- Educating the public

The Alliance's [Homelessness Research Institute](#) leads the way in developing and analyzing research about the homeless population. This research helps inform opinion leaders about the depth and complexities of homelessness and its solutions.

How many people are homeless?

As of the last, official count, about 671,859 people experience homelessness on any given night in the United States. State by state data can be found on our [interactive map](#).

How many people are homeless in my community?

The Alliance offers a couple interactive tools to help answer this question. The [State by State interactive tool](#) and the [Multi-Year Homelessness Counts Map](#) offer information about homeless numbers by state and region.

Why are people homeless?

Specific reasons vary, but research shows people are homeless because they can't find housing they can afford. [According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#), **an estimated 12 million renter and homeowner households now pay more than 50 percent of their annual incomes for housing**, and a family with one full-time worker earning the minimum wage cannot afford the local fair-market rent for a two-bedroom apartment anywhere in the United States.

HUD also notes that the generally accepted definition of housing affordability is no more than 30 percent of monthly income going toward housing costs. Families or individuals who pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing are considered "cost-burdened" and can have difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, and medical care.

The lack of affordable housing is a significant hardship for low-income households and can prevent them from meeting their other basic needs, such as nutrition and health care, or saving for their future.

You can learn more about why some specific groups experience homelessness – families, youth, and veterans, for instance – on our [blog](#).

How can I get help if I am homeless or about to be homeless?

The Alliance is a research- and policy-based organization, and as such is not a direct-service provider with the capacity to directly assist people in need of immediate assistance.

However, we do know of some places that may be more helpful. Immediate sources of aid in your community can be found by consulting your local department of social services or your local branch

of the [Salvation Army](#) or the [United Way help line](#). You may also find it helpful to consult directories of homeless service providers by the the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) and the [National Coalition for the Homeless](#).

An organization called Neighborworks also has a hotline, 888-995-HOPE, and a [website](#) to help homeowners avoid foreclosure. For assistance specifically with default/foreclosure or rental needs, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has provided a list of [approved housing counseling agencies](#).

What do the demographics of homelessness look like?

Data indicates that the average homeless person is a middle-aged African American man, but the chart below provides more insight into the demographics of the homeless population in the U.S. Below is a chart with common demographics from the [2008 Annual Homeless Assessment Report](#), published in July 2009.

	Percentage of All Sheltered Homeless Population	Percentage of Individuals	Percentage of Persons in Families
Gender			
Male	64.0%	72.5%	19.2%
Female	36.0%	27.5%	80.8%
Race			
White, Non-Hispanic	37.9%	44.6%	24.4%
White, Hispanic	11.6%	11.0%	13.1%
Black or African American	41.7%	37.0%	50.9%
Other Single Race	3.4%	2.8%	4.8%
Multiple Races	5.4%	4.7%	6.8%
Age			
Under Age 18	20.4%	2.0%	60.3%
18 to 30	22.5%	22.5%	21.5%
31 – 50	40.3%	51.5%	16.7%
51 – 61	14.0%	20.0%	1.3%
62 and older	2.8%	4.0%	0.2%
Household Size			

1 person	66.7%	97.8%	0.0%
2 people	9.3%	1.9%	25.0%
3 people	9.5%	0.2%	29.6%
4 people	7.0%	0.1%	21.8%
5 or more people	7.5%	0.0%	23.7%
Special Populations			
Veterans (adults only)	11.6%	13.4%	2.0%
Disabled (adults only)	42.8%	47.1%	18.4%

How many shelters are there (per state)?

Officially, we don't know. We do, however, have some good leads.

Although it's probably not comprehensive, a homeless shelter directory can also be found at www.homelessshelterdirectory.org. These groups may be able to help you identify a number of resources, including free legal services in your community. You can also visit http://4homeless.hypermart.net/soup_kitchens.html. Scroll down and click on your state on the interactive map, and it will show you links to resources for emergency food and shelter in your state.

For federal assistance, HUD does have local offices in each state. On [this page](#), you can select your state and find a local HUD office that can give you information on federal programs, including rental assistance programs, housing counselors, and [Continuum of Care \(CoC\) contacts](#). Often, the state page also has links to local *food banks*, *shelters*, and *legal services*.

What do you mean when you say "CoC"?

There are states, cities, counties, communities, districts – and then there are Continuums of Care.

Like those other terms, a "Continuum of Care" (CoC) simply refers to an administrative geographical unit – the local or regional body that coordinates funding and services for homeless people.

What are the funding sources for shelters and programs?

There are many – both public and private.

On the federal government side, there's the [McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants](#). This represents the *largest federal investment* in homeless assistance, and is responsible for funding many local shelter and housing programs.

Soon, the McKinney-Vento program will undergo considerable change as a result of *the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act*. In 2009, Congress passed the [HEARTH Act](#) which reauthorized the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance programs and made some considerable changes to the program. The changes outlined in the HEARTH Act will be implemented starting in late 2011 and early 2012, and include:

- Increased emphasis on homeless families with children,
 - Increased emphasis on homelessness prevention,
- Incentives for developing permanent supportive housing, and
- Grants greater financial discretionary authority to rural communities.

Currently, homeless and housing advocates are asking Congress to increase the budget for McKinney-Vento assistance programs. Though the Administration's FY 2011 budget proposal does call for a ten percent increase, approximately \$2.4 billion is required in FY 2011 to fully implement the changes in the HEARTH Act while continuing to fund existing homeless assistance programs.

Also new in the federal homeless assistance field is the *Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program* (HPRP). In February 2009, the federal government created the [Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program \(HPRP\)](#), a \$1.5 billion stimulus-funded program to curb and eliminate homelessness resulting from the current recession. These funds – which have been distributed to communities – are intended to be used for prevention and rapid re-housing programs. You can find how much money your Continuum of Care (CoC) received by clicking “Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing” on the [HUD Recovery page](#).

HPRP and the McKinney-Vento program are just two of the numerous programs within the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that help people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program, Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS, public housing, and others.

The [Department of Health and Human Services](#) also offers some homeless assistance services through the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#). As is commonly accepted, many people experiencing homelessness also experience mental health complications and/or addiction and abuse problems.

The SAMHSA programs include the Grants for the Benefit of Homeless Individuals (GBHI) program, the Treatment Systems for Homeless program, and the Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) program. In addition, efforts are underway to authorize the Services to End Long-Term Homelessness Act (SELHA), which would fund an array of services in permanent supportive housing. [Funders Together](#)

This group of philanthropists also hosts a website full of information about homelessness issues, programs, and solutions.

Other federal departments, including the Departments of Justice, Education, and Veterans' Affairs also provide programs targeted at people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

On the private side, there are a number of foundations and for-profit organizations that contribute to homeless assistance programs. The following foundations are particularly dedicated to the cause of homelessness:

- [United Way](#)

United Way has a longstanding reputation as a leader in eliminating homelessness at a national and local level. Most states and communities have local United Way branches. You can see if your area has a local branch by entering your

zip code at the top right hand box on their homepage.

- [The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation](#)

In their domestic efforts, the MacArthur Foundation provides grants for community development and affordable housing projects. You can see their guidelines for applying for grants on [this page](#).

For other resources, the [Foundations Center](#) and [Council on Foundations](#) are both great places to look for local grantmakers.

How many youth are homeless and why?

To the best of our knowledge, there are approximately *50,000 street homeless youth* (that is, young people who live on the streets, in abandoned buildings, in the woods, in cars, and not in some sort of shelter) and *at least one million* who young people experience at least one night of homelessness per year.

So far, measuring youth homelessness has been a major challenge; unfortunately, significant, seminal data on youth does not yet exist. While hard data isn't available, the Alliance estimates that young adults ages 18 to 25 make up 40 percent of street youth and about 33 percent of the total homeless youth population. We do know that young people of all demographic groups run away and may experience an episode of homelessness.

For more information on youth homelessness, visit our [Youth Homelessness webpage](#).

What are some common health problems related to homelessness?

Many homeless people come into homelessness with existing health problems – for some, a health problem may be the cause of homelessness. Health care bills still remain a [major cause of bankruptcy](#), which can lead to homelessness.

Homeless people suffer from high rates of mental and physical health problems exacerbated by living on the streets and in shelters. Approximately half of people experiencing homelessness suffer from mental health issues. At any given point in time, 45 percent of homeless people report indicators of mental health problems during the past year. About 25 percent of the homelessness population has serious mental illness. Substance use is also prevalent among homeless populations.

These health conditions often require long-term, consistent care. **Homelessness inhibits this care, as housing instability often detracts from regular medical attention, access to treatment, and recuperation.** This inability to treat medical problems often aggravates them, making them both more dangerous and more costly.

For more information on health issues connected with homelessness, visit our [Mental/Physical Health webpage](#).

How do we compare urban and rural homelessness?

In the summer of 2009, the Alliance began a [series of briefs](#) about the distribution of the homeless population across five distinct geographic types - urban, mostly urban, rural, mostly rural, and urban-rural mix. We found that while the distribution at the national level is overwhelmingly urban, there is wide variation across states.

Collectively, urban areas have the highest rate of homelessness – about 29 people per 10,000 – and those areas classified as “mostly urban” rank second with a rate of 19 homeless people per 10,000. Rural areas have the next highest rates: 14 people per 10,000.

There are some rural areas with very high rates of homelessness, and two of the highest rates in the country are in rural communities. However, the rates of homelessness within the rural category vary widely (more widely than any other category), and as a group, rural areas have a rate only half that of urban areas.

There are a number of explanations for the observed rate of homelessness being lower than what might have been expected: many extremely poor people in rural areas do not stay in shelters but rather double-up with family or friends or live in substandard housing, and many leave rural areas in search of increased employment opportunities and social services. While rural areas certainly have poverty to contend with – one in five rural counties have rates of poverty over 20 percent – homelessness as HUD defines it is less prevalent in these areas than in urban areas (see *Rural Income, Poverty and Welfare: Rural Poverty* by U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service).

In fact, the lack of services and assistance in rural areas is demonstrated through the behavior of those experiencing homelessness. For instance, we see the percent of persons in families with children who are unsheltered is quite low in urban areas compared to the other four geographic categories. The rate of unsheltered persons in families in rural areas is almost double that of urban areas. Rural areas often lack the level of emergency shelter and other resources that are commonplace in urban areas.

For more information about the discrepancy in services between rural and urban areas, see [Rural Homelessness](#).